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ABSTRACT

A rationale for counselors instructing students in study skills is presented in this fact sheet and research and assessment are discussed. A section on instructional content focuses on reading, notetaking, test taking, and time management. Three behavior modification techniques and three study skills instruction formats are discussed. The Study Improvement Program model is described. (NB)

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HIGHLIGHTS

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...An ERIC/CAPS Fact Sheet

Counseling for Study Skills

Rationale

Counseling and guidance professionals are increasingly serving the learning and developmental needs of all students, rather than the therapeutic or remedial needs of a few. In the area of learning, study skills stand at the top of the list along with reading, writing, mathematics and reasoning. In the area of adolescent development, a number of tasks relate directly to academic achievement; for example, studying effectively, producing in work situations under adult performance standards, and establishing a worker identity. Counselors' expertise in these areas thus makes specialized study skills instruction a logical part of the counseling role at all educational levels.

Research

Research and practice have increased our knowledge of how students learn and do not learn. Because problems in academic performance have been found to relate to study skills deficits and to emotional and personal problems, the complex needs of the student with academic difficulties are best served by an interactive learning system consisting of primary strategies (study skills) and support strategies (counseling). Successful study skills programs incorporate this dual approach by including:

- Study skills instruction combined with counseling.
- Group rather than individual counseling.
- High levels of warmth, empathy, and genuineness.
- Skills instruction related to content material.
- Structured rather than unstructured formats.
- Longer programs (ten hours or more).
- Voluntary participation (at the college level).

Assessment

To design a program capable of meeting these complex needs requires information about students' knowledge and use of general and specific study methods, and about personality characteristics which affect learning. A widely used measure of study skills is the Survey of Study Habits and Attitudes (SSHA, by Brown & Holtzman), a 100-item inventory with four scales measuring habits and attitudes: work methods (use of effective study procedures); delay avoidance (promptness in completing assignments and ability to resist distractions); teacher approval (students' feelings and opinions about teachers); and educational acceptance (students' approval of educational objectives, practices and requirements). Another measure is the Student Attitudes Inventory (SAI, by Entwistle), which has 47 true-false items with four scales: motivation, 14 questions; study methods, 14 questions; examination technique, nine questions; and lack of distractions, ten questions.

Measures of learning style provide information for adapting instruction to personal style. Although several instruments are called the Learning Style Inventory (LSI), each refers to a slightly different view of the concept. LSI by Canfield and Lafferty is a self-report instrument for use with junior high school through adult levels based on a rank ordering of choices for each of 30 questions. Administration time is approximately 15 minutes. It can be used to develop instructional materials for a whole class or for individual students. Its emphasis on attitudinal and affective dimensions makes it a useful tool for counseling.

LSI by Dunn, Dunn and Price is a self-report instrument for use with grades 3-12 based on a rank ordering for each of 104 items. Approximate administration time is 30 minutes. An accompanying manual suggests prescriptions to complement selected styles to facilitate academic achievement.

LSI by Kolb is a self-report instrument for young adults based on a rank ordering of four possible words in each of nine different sets. Approximate administration time is 5-10 minutes. Emphasis is on awareness of personal learning style and available alternative modes.

Another measure of personality is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) which can be used as an initial screening device. This measure discriminates between those who tend to improve their academic performance with traditional study skills instruction (judgers) and those who are influenced by the amount of course structure provided (perceivers).

Since study skills deficits are often accompanied by poor test performance, a tool for identifying students whose performance is related to personality rather than knowledge is useful. The Achievement Anxiety Test (AAT, by Alpert & Haber) consists of two parts, the facilitating and debilitating anxiety scales, and can be used for this purpose.

Instructional Content

Specific instruction can be developed at all educational levels from basic skill building themes. They include: (1) locating information — using tables of contents, indexes, reader's guides, dictionaries, thesauri, encyclopedias, almanacs, libraries, catalogues, and computerized information retrieval; (2) selecting information — determining main ideas and supporting detail; (3) organizing information — summarizing, notetaking, determining organizational patterns, listening; (4) understanding graphic aids; (5) following simple and complex oral and written directions; (6) developing reading flexibility; (7) remembering information — studying for examinations; (8) using time wisely; and (9) using effective writing skills.

Reading. Underlining, outlining and highlighting are all standard methods for focusing attention and increasing understanding of written texts. The SQ3R and REAP methods require the additional step of processing information in a tangible way and are also widely used.

The SQ3R technique for reading and studying textbooks involves five steps: (1) Survey — glance at chapter headings, read summaries, determine organization; (2) Question — formulate questions about each section to direct further reading; (3) Read — while reading, actively search for answers to formulated questions; (4) Recite — answer questions without reference to the text; and (5) Review — list major

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subpoints under each heading. Notecards, notebooks and or tape recorders can be useful adjuncts to this approach.

The REAP reading and study method has four basic steps: Read to discover the message; Encode the message in one's own words; Annotate by writing the message in notes; Ponder the message by processing it through thinking and discussion. Central to the REAP procedure is the process of writing an annotation designed to achieve certain learning objectives. Seven annotation formats have been developed for use with different types of text (summary, thesis, question, critical, heuristic, intention, and motivation).

Notetaking. While fewer systematic hints on how to keep notes have been devised, the 5R's from the Cornell Study Center incorporates the basic processes of effective reading: Record — pick out main ideas; Reduce — summarize, note key terms; Recite — repeat key ideas to oneself; Reflect — think about content; Review — recall and commit to memory.

Test Taking. Instruction in this area involves the following: (1) test preparation — frequent and planful study, adequate rest and diet, blocking out distractions; (2) hints for taking objective and subjective examinations; (3) test wiseness — following instructions, scanning, pacing, reviewing; (4) learning from examinations; (5) managing test anxiety — replacing negative self-statements with positive ones, breathing techniques, progressive relaxation, and desensitization.

Time Management. Common components of time management instruction include: (1) record keeping procedures — daily schedules or diaries to identify habits; (2) schedule planning based on the identified habits and incorporating fixed events; (3) life support activities; (4) leisure time; (5) study time blocked out to allow a commitment for each course; (6) realistic goals for each study session; (7) study breaks; (8) coordination with individual energy periods; and (9) planned use of short time intervals.

Techniques

Behavior modification techniques, which teach people to control their own behavior and change undesirable habits, are readily adapted to individual students and are often applied to infrequent and ineffective studying.

Self-Observation or Self-Monitoring. The learner attempts to observe himself/herself objectively by charting, measuring or counting study behaviors. Equipment can be a simple paper and pencil record or sophisticated computer controlled monitoring. The data serve as a baseline for evaluating change.

Stimulus Control. This technique involves changing the environment. Like all behavior, studying is under some kind of stimulus control, and changing the stimulus will change the behavior. Finding a new, less distracting place to study is an example of this type of environmental change. The knowledge gained from self-observation techniques can help in understanding and changing significant environmental stimuli.

Behavioral Contracts. The learner contracts and administers rewards and punishments based on whether study has been effective or not. The aim of this technique is to increase pre-selected study behavior and reduce undesirable alternatives.

Format

Whether study skills instruction is incorporated into the total curriculum (which is often the case at the middle school and secondary levels) or is a separate course or workshop, a number of formats can be employed:

A combined lecture/peer discussion/practice format focusing on knowledge and use of study skills and emotions allows students to become practiced in active participation in the learning situation, and to overcome anxieties related to academic problems.

Peer tutoring/counseling is an efficient means of providing study skills training to large numbers of students. A successful peer program will require professional supervision, a comprehensive selection process, a good library of study skills books and materials, coordination with counselors and academic advisors or teachers, individual follow-up, and support for the paraprofessional staff.

Programmed and computerized study skills instructions, written instructions and handouts, and audio- and videotapes are also means to reach large numbers of students with the use of fewer personnel. The role of the counselor instructor in these systems requires assessment, introduction and follow-up, identification of additional resources, and identification and exploration of related personal problems.

The SIP Model

The Study Improvement Program (SIP) offered to second semester college freshmen at the University of Rochester, New York, incorporates the principles suggested here (Malett, 1983, EJ 279 214). In this model, ten paraprofessionals (five men, five women) are selected on the basis of recommendations from staff, faculty, and student leaders; screening interviews, minimum grade point average (2.7, where A = 4.0); and completion of one natural science course.

Training consists of a three-hour seminar once a week (including homework) in basic counseling skills, study skills techniques, and applications to study behaviors of self-control techniques. The seminar format consists of didactic presentations, modeling, practice, and videotaped feedback, with the goal of teaching attending, paraphrasing, questioning, reflection of feelings, interviewing, and related small group discussion techniques. Seminar instructors also model the teaching of study skills and self-control techniques by having the prospective leaders function as a simulated SIP group.

Male-female pairs of SIP leaders conduct the 11 half-hour group sessions comprising SIP. Seven sessions are technique-oriented, directed primarily to teaching behavioral self-control as a study technique, and three sessions are semi-structured discussions of personal factors affecting academic performance. In addition, each group member meets individually with a group leader twice during the semester for a one-hour counseling and problem solving session. The format for individual sessions consists of a review of the previous week's session, formal instruction, practice and homework assignments.

The total 11 sessions are as follows: (1) introduction/self-control techniques; (2) time management; (3) textbook reading efficiency skills; (4) discussion of the importance of grades; (5) stimulus control; (6) test taking and anxiety management; (7) discussion of academic and non-academic pressures; (8) lecture notetaking; (9) discussion of values; (10) writing papers; and (11) problem solving.

Resource Documents

Dunn, R., et al. Learning style researchers define differences differently. *Educational Leadership*, 1981, *38*(5), 372-375. (EJ 242 309)

Eanet, M. G. *An investigation of the REAP reading study procedure: Its rationale and efficacy*. Paper presented at the 27th Annual Meeting of the National Reading Conference, New Orleans, December 1977. (ED 149 323)

Maher, M. F., & Thompson, M. K. The developmental guidance workshop: Outreach in action. *The School Counselor*, 1980, *28*(1), 39-49. (EJ 233 892)

Malett, S. D. Description and subjective evaluation of an objectively successful study improvement program. *The Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 1983, *61*(6), 341-345. (EJ 279 214)

Rabyak, J. E. A revised study skills model: Do some of them practice what we teach? *The Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 1977, *56*(3), 171-175. (EJ 169 341)

Note: In addition to these resource documents, a list of recommended materials is available upon request. Please direct inquiries to ERIC/CAPS User Services, 2108 School of Education, The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1259 (313/764-9492).

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